

AN OPEN LETTER TO CLARENCE SEXTON ABOUT THE FRIENDSHIP CONFERENCE

Updated May 2, 2010 (first published March 3, 2010) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

The following is a slightly expanded edition of a letter that I sent by e-mail to Dr. Clarence Sexton on October 20, 2009. Since I did not receive a reply, I decided to publish it. I believe that there are still some Independent Baptist preachers that will have an ear to hear this warning instead of mischaracterizing it as “unnecessarily divisive.”

Hello, Dr. Sexton,

I trust that things are going well in your life and ministry. I want you to know that I thank the Lord for your desire to believe God and to step out to do something significant for the cause of Christ in this day and time.

You don't know me personally, but I you are aware of my writings. I am a missionary church planter in Nepal and the director of Way of Life Literature.

What I am writing about is my deep concern about the Independent Baptist Friends International conference scheduled for April 2010.

I am very concerned about the Independent Baptist movement, having become an Independent Baptist by conviction after I was saved at age 23 in 1973. I graduated from the Tennessee Temple Bible School in 1977 and considered Bruce Lackey my mentor. I was married in his church in 1976.

In a video presentation at your web site you describe the Friends Conference as follows:

“Friendship is the bridge that leads from truth to world evangelism. ... The purpose is the furtherance of the gospel. Time is running out. ... We can't violate the principle of truth. If it doesn't pass this test, it shouldn't go any further. ... The Bible says that two cannot walk together except they be agreed. If someone asked me what I am, I would say I am a separatist Baptist. There is no doubt about that. I am separated to the Lord and from the world. ... It's not a meeting to get everybody together, because we are trying to bring people of like mind, of like faith, biblical separatist people, independent Baptist people, into a meeting, so they can help one another and encourage one another” (http://issuu.com/thecrowncollege/docs/09-07_baptist_vision).

I agree with the theme of truth-friendship-world evangelism. I believe that we must be committed to all of the truth of God's Word. I believe that we should be friends with those who are committed to the truth. I believe that world evangelism is Christ's Great Commission and the saving of souls is the reason why He has not yet returned.

I agree with your vision as you have described it. There is a need for Bible-believing men to befriend one another and to work together to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and establish strong churches as the pillar and ground of the truth. There is a need to learn from one another, to expand our horizons, to get out of the deep rut that characterizes too many IB churches.

What I disagree with is not drawing the line clearly and consistently enough from Independent Baptists who are not true separatists, from those who are associating with the SBC, who are using CCM, and who are moving rapidly in the contemporary, wishy-washy direction.

You say that you want no truck with the SBC. Why, then, are you inviting men to participate in the Friends conference that have close associations with the convention?

Consider, for example, Ralph Sexton, Jr. I know that you also appeared with him in the Impact Youth Conference in July of this year. Surely you know that Ralph has represented the weak, un-separated side of Independent Baptists for decades. A pastor from Texas wrote to me in August of this year and said:

"This past month, Dr. Sexton spoke with Ralph Sexton, Steve Roberson, and others at the Impact Conference in Tennessee. I guess I understand his desire to influence young people, but I don't understand why he would join men whose own websites promote their upcoming meetings with and financial support for Southern Baptists. The music groups at this conference, like the Ball Brothers and the Daybreak Quartet, have itineraries which include Methodist, Assembly of God, and a variety denominations. At least two of the speakers at the upcoming Baptist Friends Conference are speaking with Southern Baptists this fall according to Ralph Sexton's cruise website. I'm sure Pastor Hoskins is a nice man, but his church is Southern Baptist" (Pastor J. Smith).

Whatever Ralph Sexton, Jr., Steve Roberson, the Ball Brothers, and the Daybreak Quartet are, they are not biblical separatists.

Ralph Sexton regularly joins hands with Southern Baptist preachers. For example, he is scheduled for the Singing at Sea Cruise, joining hands in that forum with Phil Hoskins who pastors a large SBC congregation (Higher Ground Baptist in Kingsport, Tennessee) and was an SBC evangelist for 12 years. This cruise features many Southern Gospel groups that are definitely not separatist, and many of them, such as Jeff and Sheri Easter and Brian Free and Assurance and Soul'd Out, play raunchy rock and roll/rockabilly/blues. Squire Parsons is typical

in that he performs in Southern Baptist, Church of Christ, Church of God, Nazarene, Free Will Baptist, Methodist, and other types of churches.

Another speaker scheduled for the Friends conference in April is Andrew Phipps. He regularly speaks at Freewill Baptist, Southern Baptist, Christian Unity, Social Brethren, and other types of churches. He is intimately associated with the contemporary Southern Gospel movement. For example he was scheduled to appear at the National Quartet Convention in 2009. (For the deep compromise represented in this see the article “A Visit to the National Quartet Convention” at the Way of Life web site.) In researching Phipps, I was surprised to see that Crown College joined hands with him at the Knoxville Remembers conference in September 2009. [Note: Phipps didn’t speak at the 2010 IB Friends Conference, but he was scheduled to speak when I wrote this letter to Dr. Sexton.]

Dr. Sexton, why include men like this in a meeting that is supposed to represent the separated side of Independent Baptists?

I am not familiar with all of the men slated as speakers for the 2010 Independent Baptist Friends conference, but some that I do know personally or know of are separatists and stand for the strong side of the IB movement. Why not limit the conference to such men? Why not limit the conference to men who refuse to preach at Southern Baptist churches or at conferences that feature Southern Baptists and contemporary music and that represent the destruction of biblical standards?

WHAT YOUR CURRENT PLAN WILL DO IS WEAKEN THE PRESENT AND NEXT GENERATION OF INDEPENDENT BAPTISTS IN THE MATTER OF SEPARATION. It is very doubtful that you will influence Ralph Sexton, Jr., *et al*, toward a stronger separatist position, but the wishy-washy men will doubtless influence some of your people and students to a weaker stand. It has been said that what parents do in moderation their children do in excess.

It might even be that this little compromise with biblical separation, this little footsying with non-separatists, will lay the foundation for your church and school to join the SBC down the road, just as happened to Highland Park Baptist Church and Tennessee Temple.

The principle of separation is very practical. It is based on the truth that bad apples corrupt good ones. I have no animosity or ill will whatsoever toward Ralph Sexton, Jr., or other men that I consider wishy-washy, or even toward their contemporary/ecumenical friends. They stand or fall to the Lord, not to me. But their principles are different from mine. What they believe and practice is different from what I believe and practice. They are wishy-washy toward CCM and contemporary Southern Gospel, whereas I believe it is of the world and the flesh. They don’t speak out on issues such as New Evangelicalism and Billy Grahamism and Rick Warrenism and other contemporary compromises, whereas I believe that the trumpet against such things should be sounded long and loud and with distinct notes. They believe in mixed bathing and that Christian girls wearing one-piece and even two-piece bathing suits are “modest”; I believe that

this is public nudity and results in fornication. The 2009 Impact Conference guideline for swimsuits was “conservative one-piece bathing suits or two piece with a tank top style top” (<http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:dSm34LkII40J:www.opendooronline.com/teens/General%2520Information%2520and%2520Teen%2520Ministry%2520Guidelines.pdf+IMPACT+CONFERENCE+ralph+sexton&hl=en&gl=np&sig=AFQjCNEndmmvDZHI8NOYgNuHcyNQSmrkw>).

The kids at the Impact Conference were taken to Dolly Parton’s very worldly Dollywood for entertainment. Parton’s 2008 album, *Backwoods Barbie*, mixed a vaguely defined “Jesus” with moral debauchery. There was a song about Jesus, but there were also songs about drinking, carousing, breaking one’s sacred marital vows, and sleeping with someone outside of marriage, all from a very “non-judgmental” perspective. This is 2 Timothy 4:3 Christianity. “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.*” Parton dresses extremely immodestly and has played the madam in an R-rated movie about a house of prostitution. She has covered Led Zeppelin’s occultic song “Stairway to Heaven” and John Lennon’s atheist song “Imagine.” She joined the Dixie Chicks, Carole King, Yoko Ono, and others to record a benefit album in support of the Human Rights Campaign, a radical homosexual rights organization. Parton’s Jesus is not the one revealed in Scripture. She says, “God isn’t the monster in the sky that I grew up with [in the Church of God]. He’s a feelin’ within you” (*Parade*, Nov. 2, 1980). For the stage production for her song “Go to Hell,” she used 12 dancers. She said, “We do this with six dancers on the devil’s side and six on the Lord’s side. At the end of the song, they all merge and we all go into the light” (“Dolly’s Flame Worthy Streak Continues,” Country Music Television, April 21, 2004). This would appear to depict the New Age-Hindu concept that everything is one, that good is evil and evil is good, that everything is evolving and merging into one. In spite of this, Dolly is popular with the Southern Gospel crowd. The Southern Gospel Hall of Fame is located at the Dollywood entertainment center and they host a 30-day Southern Gospel Jubilee each year. This is another example of the worldliness and unscriptural “judge not” philosophy that permeates much of Southern Gospel today.

Why would Independent Baptist preachers take their young people to Dolly Parton’s entertainment park? Because they don’t believe in separation.

You have said that Independent Baptist Friends International is all about evangelism and world missions. I share that concern, and that is one reason why I believe in separation. As a long-time missionary church planter, I am deeply concerned about the influence that men have on the people we have led to Christ and are responsible to disciple. I would not want worldly Southern Baptists who are enemies of separation or Southern Baptist sympathizers such as Ralph Sexton, Jr. to influence them.

It is that simple.

What I would urge you to do is draw the lines for Independent Baptist Friends conference more consistently and strictly and follow it up by an Independent Baptist STANDS conference that would plainly expose compromise and error among Independent Baptists and would identify those who are leading God's people astray.

In Christ,
David Cloud

Distributed by Way of Life Literature's Fundamental Baptist Information Service, an e-mail listing for Fundamental Baptists and other fundamentalist, Bible-believing Christians. OUR GOAL IN THIS PARTICULAR ASPECT OF OUR MINISTRY IS NOT DEVOTIONAL BUT IS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO ASSIST PREACHERS IN THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCHES IN THIS APOSTATE HOUR. This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the list. If somehow you have subscribed unintentionally, following are the instructions for removal. The Fundamental Baptist Information Service mailing list is automated. To SUBSCRIBE, go to <http://www.wayoflife.org/wayoflife/subscribe.html>. TO UNSUBSCRIBE OR CHANGE ADDRESSES, go to the very bottom of any email received from us and click "Manage My Subscription." If you have any trouble with this, please let us know. We take up a quarterly offering to fund this ministry, and those who use the materials are expected to participate (Galatians 6:6) if they can. Some of the articles are from O Timothy magazine, which is in its 26th year of publication. Way of Life publishes many helpful books. The catalog is located at the web site: <http://www.wayoflife.org/publications/index.html>. Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061. 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org. We do not solicit funds from those who do not agree with our preaching and who are not helped by these publications, but only from those who are. OFFERINGS can be made at <http://www.wayoflife.org/wayoflife/makeanoffering.html>. PAYPAL offerings can be made to <https://www.paypal.com/xclick/business=dcloud%40wayoflife.org>

WAY OF LIFE LITERATURE SHARING POLICY: Much of our material is available for free, such as the hundreds of articles at the Way of Life web site. Other items we sell to help fund our very expensive literature, video, and foreign church planting ministry. Way of Life's content falls into two categories: sharable and non-sharable. Things that we encourage you to share include the audio sermons, video presentations, O Timothy magazine, and FBIS articles. You are free to make copies of these at your own expense and share them with friends and family. You are also welcome to use excerpts from the articles. All we ask is that you give proper credit. Things we do not want copied and distributed freely are items like the Fundamental Baptist Digital Library, print edition of our books, PDFs of the books, etc. These items have taken years to produce at enormous expense in time and money, and we need the income from the sale of these to help fund the ministry. We trust that your Christian honesty will preserve the integrity of this policy.

